

Fil-Am Community Church  
Pastor Rolly Estabillo  
1 December 2013  
Key Verse: Luke 2:8-20

## “Go, Tell It on the Mountain!”

Good morning! Welcome to the new home of Fil-Am Community Church. If this is your first time in this church, thank you for coming. Before we came to this school, we used to meet at the Verizon Center. Just kidding. Where we met before is just about a little over two miles from here, also in an elementary school, called Springfield Estates Elementary School. After three years and 24 days to be exact, we have moved to this school because the other one is going to be renovated early next year. They told me it's going to be really modern and beautiful once it's completed. Whether we're going back there, that's up to God. We just follow his lead, Amen?

For now, God has planted us here and this is where he wants us to bloom. I believe God is moving in our lives, in this church, and he has a wonderful plan for us. He has put us in a location where the church is visible to passersby and passing vehicles every Sunday and that tells me something. So, I'm excited about what God will do in the coming months. Are you excited?

This place is quite neat. This cafeteria may not be as large as the one before but it is cozy. But don't get too comfortable that you sleep on me while I'm preaching. And the nursery is right next to us where the volunteers can listen to what's going on here. Who are our nursery volunteers this morning? If you can hear me, just say “Amen!” The gym is regular size and can be used every Sunday from 2-4 PM. That's Dale's territory. So, see Dale. The rooms for our Sunday

school and **IMPACT** classes are spacious. So, I think this is a good deal. God is good? All the time?

Now, we don't know for how long we'll be here. It's up to God. Maybe another three years? Or more?

Some churches have met for so many years in a school before they built their own building. So, while we're waiting for that building that God will give us, we'll call this school our home, Amen?

Ok. Why don't we all stand and greet one another again. Just say "I'm blessed to see you this morning in our new home!" and mean it.

Christmas is just around the corner. You can feel it in the air literally. It's getting colder every day. And, of course, figuratively, too, because you now hear Christmas songs played daily on the radio, Christmas commercials on TV and Christmas decorations inside and outside of some houses and churches, like this beautiful Christmas tree and nativity scene on this corner. I'm not going to tell you that it's Ate Norma who made those. So, just approach her if you want her to make one for you, too. It'll be ready next year.

We're starting a new series today called "The Lights and Sounds of Christmas". The lights pertain to the Star of Bethlehem and to the glory of God as the angels announced the birth of Jesus to the shepherds. The sounds pertain to Christmas songs that all of us are familiar with. In this series, we'll look at four Christmas carols and distill from them some life-changing principles we can apply in our lives not only during Christmas season but as long as we live. Today, we'll start with an old, familiar song which was beautifully sang by our wonderful quartet, "Go Tell It on the Mountain".

This song is based on Luke's story about the shepherds being visited by the angels. No one really knows who wrote the song but it came out during the dark

and shameful period of slavery in America. The slaves, a largely uneducated people often humiliated and cruelly treated, longed for freedom. In spite of their plight, God seemed to inspire them to produce songs of incredible majesty and haunting beauty that have become known as Negro Spirituals.

Many of the slaves could neither read nor write, and their songs were preserved only in the oral tradition. Many of these songs have been saved because of the devotion of a man named John Wesley Work, an educated black choir director in Nashville, TN and lived from 1871 to 1925.

Work decided that the new generation of blacks needed to know and learn the songs their ancestors sang during the days of slavery. Work's brother, Frederick, is credited with being one of the first to recognize the power and potential of the song, "Go Tell It on the Mountain".

This song captures the feeling of an unknown slave from whose heart these words sprang. Probably unable to read the Bible, this anonymous poet imagined the reaction of the shepherds as the great light from heaven shone around them. Little did the slave know that this song, expressing the wonder in his own soul, would eventually touch the hearts of millions. But what he did know without a doubt was that the Christmas story and the fact of Christ's death, resurrection and offer of salvation needed to be told by God's people. He said that the message of Christ needed to be told from the mountaintop.

Now the mountain is a significant theological and spiritual site in Scripture. Moses received the Ten Commandments on the mountaintop and Jesus gave His most powerful sermon from a Mountain. What better place than a mountaintop to shout the good news of redemption? As the Bible says, "*How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news of peace and salvation, the news that the God of Israel reigns!*" (Isaiah 52:7)

This song talks about the birth of mankind's Savior, Jesus Christ. Sermons after sermons have been preached about the gift we ought to give to Jesus on his birthday. But what we should realize is that it is Jesus himself who gave us gifts when he was born. Because he was born, it is possible for us to receive gifts that many of us have been longing for.

What are these gifts? There are so many of them. But mind you, they are not material gifts. Their value is much more than we can put on material things. They are so significant that they can make a difference in your life and in your eternal destiny.

This morning, I'd like to share with you just three of them. Three that are based on the lives and experience of the shepherds who received the good news about Jesus' birth. As Christians, we ought to tell the world these three gifts that God has given us. If you're not a Christian, please listen carefully because God wants you to also receive these gifts.

So, what should we tell the world? We should tell that

## **I. The Birth of Jesus Brought Us the Gift of Hope**

*“And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.” (vs. 8-9)*

Not far from where the baby Jesus was born were shepherds tending their flocks. It was dark. It was quiet. It was nighttime. When suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared to the shepherds. The glory of the Lord shone around the shepherds. Brilliant shining light in the midst of the darkness of the night. And they were

terrified. The sudden shining of the glory of the Lord God of hosts encircling them filled them with terror, with horror.

The Old Testament tells us about this “glory of the Lord.” To appreciate what it was that the shepherds saw and why it terrified them, we need to go to the Old Testament. In Leviticus 9, after Moses ordained Aaron as high priest, and Aaron began his ministry and brought the first sacrifices -- after he had laid the sacrificial animals on the altar -- the glory of the Lord appeared to the people.

And fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed the sacrifices. The glory of the Lord is described as fire. As radiance. As a shining brightness.

When Isaiah saw the glory of the Lord in a vision, he said, “*Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips.*” (Is. 6:5)

The glory of the Lord is deadly to sinners. For the glory of the Lord will expose every sin in every man’s heart. It will make man feel too small and insignificant in the presence of a holy God.

This fear of God can be traced back to our first parents who committed the first sin. When God looked for Adam in the Garden of Eden and asked, “Where are you?”, Adam answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”

Adam was afraid because he was guilty of sin. This is the same feeling we have when we are confronted by our parents or by our superiors or by the police or by other people when we do something wrong. And this feeling of unworthiness is multiplied a million times over when it is God himself who confronts us. No wonder Isaiah felt so unworthy in the presence of God.

The shepherds that night experienced the same thing. In fact, literally it says in the Greek that they “feared a great fear.” What made them feel this great fear is the fact that shepherds were regarded so lowly by other people during that time.

And they felt no one wanted them. So, at that moment, they were probably thinking that God's judgment has come upon them.

But they were wrong. For we read in verse 10 following,

*“But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.’”*

The announcement of the angel must have given the shepherds a great sigh of relief. No, they were not being condemned. Rather, they were being told to not be afraid, to be joyful, to lift up their eyes in great expectation. Whatever others may have thought of them, God surely has thought of them differently. For God chose them to become the first witnesses of the birth of the Savior.

Sometimes, we may think that we are no good. We may even be hard on ourselves because of our deficiencies or what we think to be our deficiencies. We are ashamed of ourselves and say things like “I wish I was as gifted as he is; I wish I had a nose like hers; I wish I had a mind like him.” God looks beyond our physical features. He glosses over our imperfections. He doesn't take notice of our weaknesses. We may be ordinary or extraordinary, meaning, very, very ordinary, but God doesn't care. In fact, he is able to use more greatly those who are acutely aware of their humble condition.

You see, a vessel that is already full of self-importance and self-righteousness and selfishness, cannot be filled by God's power and grace. But a vessel which is empty and is willing to be emptied over and over again because it wants to be used for God's glory, can be filled to overflowing with God's power and grace.

1 Corinthians 1:26-29 tell us,

*“Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.*

*But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things--and the things that are not--to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.”*

To be chosen by God despite ourselves is a most humbling but joyful experience. We don't need to please others anymore to be accepted because God accepts us for who we are. We are pleasing in his sight already.

So, the birth of Jesus brought hope and joy to these neglected shepherds. Do you feel neglected as well? Cheer up! The arrival of Jesus on earth brought the gift of hope to you.

## **II. The Birth of Jesus also Brought Us the Gift of Salvation.**

*“When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about. So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.” (vs. 15-16)*

I have no doubt that these shepherds found salvation that very night. Why? Because they responded to God's invitation to them to see the Savior. When the angels told them that the Savior was born, they immediately rushed to see the Savior. They “hurried off” as the Bible says.

This is what the shepherds had been waiting for. In fact, this is what every Israelite in the Old Testament had been waiting for. They had been waiting for the coming of the Messiah for hundreds of years. And that is how the people in the Old Testament were saved. They were saved by the grace of God through faith in the coming Messiah.

When the Messiah came that night, the shepherds and some people, including the wise men received him. But others, like Herod and those in Jerusalem rejected him. The Bible says *“When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.”* (Matthew 2:3)

What happened that night was the most important event in all of mankind’s history. No wonder God’s enemy, the Devil, did all he can to prevent it from happening.

He knew since the beginning of creation that God was going to send a Savior. Because he was there. It was prophesied right there in the Garden of Eden, after he had tempted the first human pair to commit a sin. In Genesis 3:15, God says to Satan, who appeared as a serpent, *“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”*

Satan knew that he was running out of time. If the Messiah was born, that signaled the beginning of his end. The Messiah will crush his head, as the prophecy says. That actually happened when Jesus died and rose from dead. That means that anyone, not only the Israelites, can also rise from the dead. Salvation is available to everyone. And so, the Devil used Herod to try to kill the baby Jesus. He failed in his first attempt when the wise men did not return to Herod to report where Jesus was born. And then, in his second attempt two years later he failed as well. Herod ordered the slaughter of all baby boys in Jerusalem but Jesus was whisked off to Egypt by his parents.

Now, what happened next is interesting. Verses 17-18 say, *“When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child.”*

These shepherds couldn’t contain their joy and excitement. Immediately they went around telling others of what they saw. They were the first evangelists.

And they had a good harvest of souls for we read in v. 18 “*all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.*” With all likelihood, these people also rushed out to see the baby. There must be a mild commotion in that little stable where Jesus laid. But, I’m sure, everyone had a very memorable night. Mary, as verse 19 tells us, “*treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.*” She must have felt supremely humbled and overwhelmed by the privilege of being chosen by God to be the mother of the Savior.

Folks, in this time of celebration, let us not forget that God wants us to share the excitement of having Jesus in our hearts with others. God wants us to spread the word concerning what had been told us about Jesus.

I remember a conference I attended and there I heard the testimony of a Christian Jew or a Messianic Jew. He testified that before he became a Christian, he was in the army and in the army, someone invited him to church. Out of curiosity, he went but he wasn’t impressed. This someone became his friend. He noticed that his friend’s lifestyle was different from the others in the army. His friend also talked to him about Jesus. But still he wasn’t impressed. During that time, however, his life had no direction. He was a Jew who observed all their religious holidays and who tried to obey all the commandments but he had no peace. He was supposed to be feeling privileged because he was a part of the chosen people of God but he felt terrible inside. Then, one day, while having a shower, he realized that he was a sinner who needed a Savior. He bowed his head and right there, in the shower, he accepted Jesus in his heart. I guess we can say that he was also baptized at the same time.

Who would have known that a Jew like him would become a believer in Jesus? All it took was sharing Jesus with him and letting God take care of the rest. As God declares in Isaiah,

*“So is my word that goes out of my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but it will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it” (Is. 55:11)*

So, what do we need to tell others? That the birth of Jesus brought us the gift of hope. It also brought us the gift of salvation. And finally,

### **III. The Birth of Jesus Brought Us the Gift of Transformation.**

v. 20 says, *“The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.”*

From this verse we can see a transformation in the outlook of the shepherds. They were a scared bunch at first, now they were all full of joy and thankfulness to God. Whereas before they felt like they were the dregs of society and were afraid of God, now they are fully confident in God and in themselves. And they attributed all this to God.

Folks, nothing can be more earth-shaking than encountering God in a personal way. That is what happened to the shepherds. God revealed himself to them and their lives changed and they were never the same again.

Jesus changes you when he meets you. If you put your trust in him and believe that he died for you on the cross, he promises that he will change you inside out. The apostle Paul says in 2 Cor. 5:17 (ESV), *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”*

But before he can change you, you must first acknowledge that you need changing. Meaning, admit that you have done things that are not pleasing to God. Whether it is lying, or stealing, or cursing, or gossiping, or drinking or gambling or having an affair, admit them to God and ask for forgiveness. And God is faithful,

he will forgive you. Whatever your sin is, it could be the vilest sin, but God will forgive you.

God can forgive you because of the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. You don't have to earn your way to heaven. Jesus will save you just way you are. And this morning, I hope you will make a decision to accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior.

I read the story of this pastor in the Philippines who lost half of his family during the devastation brought by typhoon Yolanda. His name is Pastor Dante Lingo and he said that three of his children were swept away by the surging waters.

In an interview by CBN, he said, *"We were holding on to the beam of our ceiling when the big waves collapsed our house and we were swallowed by the big waves"*.

Only one son survived. When the waters subsided they found the bodies of their sons aged 13 and seven clutching each other, while the body of their 5-year-old daughter was found the next day.

The pastor's wife, Dolor, said, *"We will miss them so much. We worked so hard for their future. They helped us in our feeding ministry. We feed the children but all that is gone. We don't know where to start but we believe God will not forsake us. He has a purpose why we are still alive."*

And Pastor Lingo added, *"What happened to our life is like what happened to Job. He lost his children and his possessions. This is a very difficult time for us but we shall cling to the Lord because He alone gives us strength. And we will cling to His Word because His Word alone will sustain us."*

Folks, these people have hope because of Jesus. They have found salvation in Jesus. And the transformation that Jesus made in their lives helped them to see things in the light of eternity.

This Christmas, let us focus our eyes on Jesus. More importantly, let us tell others the hope, salvation, and transformation that can be found in Jesus.